

This information has been adapted from:

National Association of School Psychologists. (2017). *13 Reasons Why* series: Considerations for Educators (handout). Bethesda, MD: Author

### **13 REASONS WHY**

*13 Reasons Why* is a newly released Netflix series based on a novel by the same name, one which is becoming increasingly popular with teens. The series revolves around 17-year-old Hannah Baker, who takes her own life and leaves behind audio recordings for 13 people who she says in some way contributed to her killing herself. Each tape recounts painful events in which one or more of the 13 individuals played a role.

Producers of the show say they hope the series can help those who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. However, the series, which many teenagers are binge watching without adult guidance and support, is raising concerns from suicide prevention experts about the potential risks posed by the sensationalized treatment of youth suicide. The series graphically depicts rape and a suicide death and addresses in wrenching detail a number of difficult topics, including bullying, rape, drunk driving, and shaming women. The series also highlights the consequences of teenagers witnessing assaults and bullying as bystanders, and not taking action to address the situation by speaking out or telling an adult about the incident.

The National Association of School Psychologists along with other professional organizations do not recommend that vulnerable youth, especially those who have ever experienced any degree of suicidal ideation or any of the other topics highlighted – bullying, rape, drunk driving, women shaming either directly or indirectly – watch the series. Its powerful storytelling may lead impressionable viewers to romanticize the choices made by the characters, identify with the characters in the story and their experiences, and develop revenge fantasies or plans of their own to hurt themselves or others.

The series does accurately convey that there is no single cause of suicide and that suicide is not simply due to stressors, consequences, and a person's inability to cope with these situations. Usually it is the combination of treatable mental illness and overwhelming or intolerable stressors. Unfortunately, the series depicts both the school counselor and the parents as being unaware and thus ineffective in helping Hannah see other alternatives to her problems or get the help she needed.

As parents, please:

- Ask your child if he or she has heard about or seen the series *13 Reasons Why*, or read the book.
- The National Association of School Psychologists does not recommend encouraging your child to view this series.
- If your child wants to watch the series, the National Association of School Psychologists recommends you watch it first privately, and then decide if it is appropriate for your child to view.
- If you chose to allow your child to view this, please watch it with him or her and engage in conversations about the topics presented. While many young people are resilient and capable of differentiating between TV drama and real life, engaging in thoughtful conversations with them about the show is vital. This gives them the opportunity to help process the issues depicted, consider the consequences of certain choices, reinforce the message that suicide is not a good solution to problems, and that help is available. Research shows that exposure to

another person's suicide or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of death can increase a person's likelihood to seriously consider attempting suicide themselves.

- When discussing the topics addressed in this series with your child, listen to their comments without judgment. Doing so requires your full attention; that you concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said. Put your own agenda aside.
- If your child is exhibiting any warning signs of suicide or tells you about any of their friends who are feeling this way, take their comments and actions seriously and seek help. Help is available from your school counselor, through the SAP program at school, and through community based mental health services.

**WARNING SIGNS** include:

- suicide threats, direct or indirect – these can be verbal, written, or are often found in online postings
- pre-occupation with death in conversations, writing, and/or drawing
- changes in behavior, hygiene/appearance, thoughts, feelings
- giving away prized possessions
- emotional distress

If you have further questions or concerns about this series or are concerned about your son or daughter please contact the Guidance Department at their school.

### **Keystone School District Guidance Counselors**

**Ms. Autumn Marshall** Grades K-5 (814) 797-1251  
**Mrs. Jen Wingard** Grades 6-8 (814) 797-1261 (HS) or (814) 797-1251 (ES)  
**Mr. Mike Mellott** Grades 9-12 (814) 797-1261

**Clarion County Crisis** (814) 226-7223  
**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** 1-800-273-8255